



# Naval Medical Research and Development

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#### Navy Medicine's Deputy Chief Readiness, Health, Visits NHRC

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*Dr. David Neri (far left), assistant deputy chief for research and development for the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, and Rear Adm. Elaine Wagner, deputy chief, readiness and health, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery tour the Naval Health Research Center. (Photo by NHRC Public Affairs)*

SAN DIEGO -- Rear Adm. Elaine Wagner, a senior flag officer in Navy Medicine, visited the Naval Health Research Center to discuss the impact of research on warfighter readiness and health, Sept. 9.

Wagner, deputy chief, readiness and health, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, talked with NHRC staff about proposed initiatives for the funding and sustainment of Navy Medicine research laboratories, while emphasizing the importance of focusing on programmatic research that aligns with fleet requirements.

According to Wagner, one of the goals of the research and development enterprise is ensuring that innovative medical treatments and products move from the bench to the battlefield, out of the hands of researchers and into the hands of warfighters and the medical personnel who care for

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them.

"There's a reason research and development falls under the readiness and health directorate, which also includes health care operations and capabilities development and integration," said Wagner. "That reason is to improve communication between those delivering patient care at the bedside with those who can find better ways of doing it."

Dr. David Neri, assistant deputy chief for research and development for the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, accompanied Wagner and underscored the need for a planned programmatic approach to research with the end in mind at the start of any research initiative.

"There will be a clear focus on the stated need or requirement," said Neri. "We will be looking for research with larger program plans, larger efforts that are collaborative and leverage other work that is going on. Key partnerships will address big issues that put better products - both knowledge and materiel products - into the hands of the warfighter."

During their visit to NHRC, Wagner and Neri toured the Warfighter Performance Lab where scientists are conducting research that addresses those big issues that impact warfighter readiness, including sleep and fatigue mitigation, injury prevention and rehabilitation, and environmental physiology.

The Warfighter Performance Lab houses several cutting-edge research tools, including the Computer Assisted Rehabilitation Environment (CAREN), an immersive virtual reality system; a sleep and fatigue lab; and an environmental chamber, a large structure that can simulate environments with temperatures ranging from -23°F to 130°F. Having each of these different research capabilities under one roof encourages collaboration and enables a wide range of possibilities for current and future research.

One researcher who is making use of the lab's diverse capabilities is Dr. Rachel Markwald, sleep research physiologist at NHRC, who provided Wagner and Neri with an overview of her current research efforts.

"My team is developing operationally relevant performance tasks using the CAREN to simulate the training environments and performance requirements of military communities," said Markwald. "We have military members perform these tasks during various levels of sleep deprivation to quantify the impact of sleep loss on simulated operational performance and explore physiological fatigue indicators."

Sleep research, according to Markwald, is an important component of keeping warfighters healthy and medically ready.

"Sleep is imperative to achieving high-level performance, and preventing and recovering from stress and illness," said Markwald. "It really is fundamental to resilience and a central component of readiness."

"Our scientists enjoyed the opportunity to hear more about Navy Medicine's strategic direction for the research and development enterprise from Admiral Wagner," said Capt. Rita Simmons, NHRC commanding officer. "She was very engaged with our researchers in the Warfighter Performance Lab as they discussed our research capabilities, which are truly unique. We have the right tools and team to do exactly what she asked of us - to conduct operationally relevant research that impacts readiness and performance."

Simmons also added that NHRC's strategic location in San Diego puts researchers within reach of nearly every type of operational unit and environment.

"We are just a short distance from two naval hospitals, several Marine Corps bases, numerous fleet resources, and a recruit training command," said Simmons. "Proximity to our fleet and infantry units ensures that we stay abreast of their needs and align our research with their

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requirements."

As the DoD's premier deployment health research center, NHRC's cutting-edge research and development is used to optimize the operational health and readiness of the nation's armed forces. In proximity to more than 95,000 active duty service members, world-class universities, and industry partners, NHRC sets the standard in joint ventures, innovation, and translational research.

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